

Information to Consider before Accepting a Fulbright Grant to Indonesia

Hundreds of former Fulbright grantees have found their time in Indonesia to be a life-changing experience. The average grantee leaves Indonesia having formed an in-depth relationship with one of the largest and most complex countries in the world, and he or she carries the experience into future careers as part of the global Fulbright alumni network. However, successful completion of a Fulbright grant in Indonesia requires overcoming certain challenges, some common to all exchange programs of this kind and some unique to Indonesia. Some of these challenges are as follows.

VISA

Under Indonesian law, each grantee is required to obtain his or her own visa to Indonesia. Unlike many other countries, Indonesia does not allocate a block of visas to a sponsoring organization such as AMINEF, but instead requires individuals to apply for their own visa in their own name. The application must pass through several government agencies, including intelligence agencies, and is subject to approval or rejection at each step of the process. AMINEF will do everything possible to assist selected grantees in obtaining the necessary visa, but issuance is ultimately the decision of the government of Indonesia and could be delayed or withheld due to circumstances outside the control of AMINEF, the U.S. government, or the grantee. This could lead to a decision to withdraw by the grantee or a decision to cancel the grant by AMINEF. This is extremely rare, but always possible.

PASSPORT: The Indonesian government requires that your passport is valid for 18 months from the date your grant begins.

HOUSING

Housing options in many areas of Indonesia are seriously limited. Environmental factors include certain areas being prone to flooding, and insects and rodents causing comfort and health risks – these can be mitigated through conscientious cleaning and use of mosquito nets, but they cannot be avoided entirely. Cultural factors include differing perceptions of privacy and acceptable noise levels – living areas in Indonesia are often much noisier than Americans may be accustomed to. Infrastructure issues include interruptions in water and electricity service. AMINEF works with grantees and host institutions to try to ensure acceptable living situations for each grantee, but conditions encountered from site to site vary greatly and a grantee should not expect his or her own living situation to be the same as that of other grantees. AMINEF is neither a landlord nor a rental agency.

HEALTH

Many health risks exist in tropical environments such as Indonesia. The medical care system in Indonesia is not as advanced as that of the United States. Medical insurance and State Department health benefit plans might not cover every kind of treatment a grantee may need. Treatment needed as a result of recreational activities and individual travel may not be covered. Prescription drugs may not be available, and needed treatment may only be available by leaving Indonesia, sometimes at considerable cost via medical evacuation (“med-evac”). Although a medical examination is required before receiving the grant, grantees are responsible for managing their own health and carefully considering whether they have any kind of chronic or acute condition, revealed in the medical examination or not, which would preclude them from safely spending nine months in Indonesia without convenient access to high-quality medical care. Such conditions could include, but are not limited to, allergies, food sensitivities, and other disorders. Benefits provided by the Department of State’s Accident and Sickness Program for Exchanges (ASPE) are subject to limitations and it is recommended that grantees retain insurance coverage from a different source during their time in Indonesia.

SCHOOLS and HOST INSTITUTIONS

As in any country, there is a great variety of schools and institutions in Indonesia. Some grantees find their schools and higher education host institutions to be professional and academically rigorous, and others do not. For example, some grantees in the Fulbright ETA program will frequently be given time off from classes for a number of reasons, while other grantees will not. Conditions encountered from site to site vary greatly and grantees should not expect their own situations to be the same as those of other grantees.

GENDER RELATIONS

Relations between men and women in Indonesia are subject to many dynamics, some of which are similar to those found in the United States and some of which are very different. Male and female grantees may experience sexual harassment, even in professional settings such as placement schools. Grantees may not be able to form friendships with individuals of the opposite gender because of prevailing social norms, and grantees may be subject to gender-based expectations from their community. Women in Indonesia, including Fulbright grantees, are frequently subject to unwanted attention and what may be perceived as sexual harassment beyond what they normally experience in

the United States. While AMINEF has no reason to believe grantees are in physical danger, it is always prudent to exercise caution and heightened awareness when abroad. Gender relations will be a topic discussed at the in-country orientation or at your initial briefing, but AMINEF is unable to change the reality that women frequently attract unwanted attention from males in Indonesia, as they do in many other countries in the region. ***Potential grantees should carefully evaluate their ability to navigate this reality and are advised to decline the grant if they feel they cannot do so.***

ACCULTURATION

Indonesia tends to be much more socially conservative than the United States, and the schools and communities in which grantees are placed are likely quite different from the university environments from which a majority of grantees come. Significant social adjustment may be required for a successful acculturation. Food options may be very limited. Opportunities for socializing in English may be very limited.

TRAVEL

As a condition of the grant, AMINEF requires that grantees report their whereabouts and abide by certain travel restrictions – depending on the grant, these may include a limited number of days away from site, including weekends, and restrictions against travelling during the first and last 30 days on site. As a condition of AMINEF being allowed to assist grantees and administer its programs, the government of Indonesia requires AMINEF to know exactly where each grantee is at all times. AMINEF is also required by the U.S. Embassy to know where grantees are in case of either natural or unnatural disasters that may affect the safety of U.S. citizens. These events have occurred in Indonesia and will likely continue to occur in the future. It is a strict requirement of the grant that grantees report their travel and abide by the travel restrictions detailed in the Award Terms and Conditions. If the grantee feels that he or she will not be able to abide by this provision, the grant should be declined.

AMINEF'S ROLE

AMINEF's role in helping grantees navigate these challenges is limited. Advice and support will be offered, but grantees should realize that AMINEF is not able to change the conditions prevailing in Indonesia. Significant adaptation will be necessary – but most grantees find the experience to be well worth it.